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SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

**NASA
MEETS
SF ART!**

GREAT
FICTION
FROM:

Keith Roberts
and
Ian Watson
plus Review
of the
SF Film
Festival at
Trieste





SCIENCE FICTION

MONTHLY

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TIMES MIRROR

We're nearly into the New Year so this issue includes two articles on a couple of the big sf-orientated events of 1975: The Apollo-Soyuz space launch and the Trieste SF Film Festival.

Apparently NASA has been inviting artists along to watch rocket launchings since 1963, in the hope that they will be able to record something that the camera misses. Sandra Miesel, an American artist who specialises in abstract needlework, was present at the Apollo-Soyuz launch in July and she has provided us with a behind-the-scenes account of the happenings at the Kennedy Space Centre. The author's name may be familiar to you as she is a prominent member of American SF fandom and has been nominated three years running for the Hugo Award for best fan writer.

Meanwhile, over in Italy SFM's ace film reporter, John Brosnan, was sweating it out at the Thirtieth Annual SF Film Festival, held this year in Trieste. The British entry, *The Land That Time Forgot*, failed to gain the Festival's grand prize which, in fact, went to one of the three American entries, *Phase IV*.

Of further delight in this issue you'll find fiction from Ian Watson and Keith Roberts, whose story 'The Worlds That Were' has been rescued from obscurity; it's been published before in Frederik Pohl's ill-fated magazine *Worlds of Tomorrow*, but since then it's evaded anthologists and editors alike. The story accompanies Mike Ashley's introduction to the works of Keith Roberts, an author perhaps best-known for his parallel-world novel, *Pavane*.

Next issue, next volume, next month, next year, we'll be publishing Part Three of Peter Weston's mammoth investigation into the theme of space travel in science fiction. There's been a break of two months since the first two parts of the article, but its plain sailing now until the final part which will appear in SFM Vol 3 No 2. The February issue will also feature an interview with Frank Kelly Freas, the great American illustrator, and we'll be using as much of his artwork as possible. But before we get to SFM 3:2, make sure you don't miss the January issue which brings you an illustrated article on *Space 1999* and a new story from Jack Williamson.

GENIUS ASTRONAUT DORMAN RECOVERY
by Paul Sallis, from *Experiments to Space* by
Hervé and Lester Drake and James Olson
(New York: Abrams, 1971)

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Times Mirror

Within the science fiction field Keith Roberts is a jack of all trades. He has mastered the art of writing enthralling short stories and captivating novels; he has edited a regular sf magazine almost single-handed, which included not only selecting the contents but also selling advertising space and preparing the artwork; he is also a talented artist and many of his drawings and paintings have appeared as covers on *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*. In this article Mike Ashley describes the man he has dubbed 'the patient craftsman' and introduces us to his work

Without a doubt Britain today has a greater wealth of science fiction and fantasy writers than at any other time in its literary history. Names like Arthur Clarke, Brian Aldiss, John Brunner, JG Ballard, EC Tubb, Kenneth Bulmer roll unprompted off the tongue, and they are considered amongst the most renowned in the genre. Yet strangely, and unfortunately, one name often omitted from such a list of British greats is that of Keith Roberts, even though a more literary and painstaking writer would be hard to find. It is only just recently, a decade after his first appearance, that a paperback collection of his fiction has been published, and most of his earlier novels are at last in print again.

'EXPERIENCE CULLED FROM HIS CAREER IS ONLY TOO EVIDENT IN HIS FICTION; MOREOVER HE WRITES THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ARTIST'

Consequently it's about time due recognition was accorded this author, of whom American author and lecturer Joanna Russ said '... (he) is a real writer. He dwells on things for their own sakes' (*F & SF*, April 1969).

Keith John Kingston Roberts was born on Friday, 20 September 1935 at Kettering, Northamptonshire, he remained an only child. Educated at Kettering Grammar School and Northampton School of Art, Roberts' artistic leanings brought about his training as a book illustrator. He later spent some years as a background artist in an animation studio. Later still he entered the advertising business, first as a finisher and general dogsbody, but then moving on to be a freelance visualiser and copywriter.

Experience culled from his career is only too evident in his fiction; moreover he writes through the eyes of an artist. The attention to detail in each and every one of his stories brings characters and events right out from the printed page into the third dimension. Take for example the following extract from 'The Lady Margaret' episode in his novel *Pavane*:

'Jesse reached down to twirl the control of the injector valve. Water, preheated by its passage through an extension of the smoke-box, swirled into the boiler. He allowed the engine to build up speed. Durnovaria vanished, lost in the gloom astern; the light was fading fast now. To right and left the land was featureless, dark; in front of him was the half-seen whirling of the crankshaft, the full thunder of the engine. The hauler grinned, still exhilarated by the physical act of driving. Flamebright striking round the firebox doors showed the wide, hard jaw, the deepest eyes under brows that were level and thickly black. Just let old Serjeantson try and sneak in a last trip. Margaret would take his Fowler up hill and down; and Eli would churn with glee in his fresh-made grave ...'

Not a word wasted, yet in that paragraph Roberts has conjured up an entire picture of the road engine speeding off into the gathering gloom. Such detail is found in all of his stories, not for the purpose of stringing out the tale but because in a Roberts story everything is important. As Joanna Russ said: '... he dwells on things for their own sakes.'

Keith Roberts discovered sf in the traditional manner of reading HC Wells at school, but he did not restrict himself to science fiction. His favourites encompass Lytton, Tennyson, Kipling and Golding. Finding he enjoyed writing, and that conventional mainstream fiction was restrictive, he entered the realms of sf in his own words, 'it was as inevitable as falling down a funnel'.

He sent some stories to Edward John Carnell, then editor of Britain's leading science fiction magazine *New Worlds*, and his companion *Science Fantasy*. It was at the time when Nova

was stepping down as editor. The material was rejected as being too short for a new project of Carnell's, and at that time the future of the sf magazines was very uncertain. In the balance, Carnell encouraged Roberts to turn his hand to longer pieces. The result was 'Boulter's Canaries', Roberts' first sale, although not his first story to see print.

'Boulter's Canaries' dwells upon a fascinatingly original explanation for poltergeists. Boulter sets out to investigate the purportedly haunted ruins of a prehistoric, pre-civilisation, using a cine camera and tape recorder. Through the use of special techniques he succeeds in filming and recording some strange phenomena, only to find himself subjected to their wrath. The story appeared in *New Writings* in '53, Carnell's new original anthology series, and was published in the spring of 1965. The same volume carried a story by Roberts called 'Manipulation' under the pen-name John Kingston; it demonstrates Roberts' delight in stories concerning the mind. The narrator, a telekinetic, begins to discover he is also telepathic as he catches out to the girl he loves. She has jilted him and he seeks a dreadful revenge.

The approach and writing shows such skill and mastery that one is led to believe Roberts has years of experience behind him, but this is not the case. It is simply an example of latent talent finally finding its true outlet.

By spring 1965 Roberts was already making a name for himself in *Science Fantasy*, whose editor was now Oxford art dealer Kyril Bonfiglioli. Actually, Roberts exploded onto the scene with three stories in the September-October 1964 issue of the magazine. 'Escapism' is an intriguing look at a small-town cinema that suddenly finds itself being used by a film crew from the future, showing film rushes taken in the past. Roberts' father had been a cinema projectionist at Kettering, and the story reveals much of Roberts' obvious boyhood association with cinemas.

The other two stories were moulded into one under the title 'Anita'. Anita is a teenage witch who lives in a cottage in Northamptonshire with her pernicious grandmother, Granny Thompson. Somehow Roberts manages to blend the right sort of humour with grim irony in the tale, bringing together the amusing antics of Granny, with the unnecessary suicide of someone Anita befriends.

The Anita stories were obviously enjoyed by the readership, over the next few months barely an issue of *Science Fantasy* would pass without a tale of Anita trying to live her own life. Particularly memorable were 'The Jennifer' (March 1965), 'The War at Foxhanger' (April 1965), and 'Idiot's Lantern' (August 1965); that last title refers to television and the cataclysmic results of Anita and her Granny appearing on a quiz programme.

Carnell had originally rejected the Anita stories because Granny lapsed too often into dialect. The truth is however that with the use of the vernacular, Roberts was able to produce a masterly piece of characterisation. Anita and Granny tolerate each other, although Anita always wishes she could be free and live her own life. Inevitably she finds she has to return to Granny for help.

Since the Anita tales were appearing under Roberts' own name, Bonfiglioli deemed it necessary to invent a pseudonym for the many other stories Roberts was producing. He came up with Alistair Bevan, one that Roberts did not particularly like but which Bonfiglioli declared was memorable. The first Bevan story, 'The Madman', appeared in the December 1964 *Science Fantasy*, and introduced us to Roberts' fears of what the future may bring.

Roberts is foremost an artist, with a marked love for the untouched English countryside, a fact evident in his Anita stories and the later *Pavane* series. The artist's attitude toward the expansion of cities is abhorrent to Roberts who tries through his fiction to show the nerve-racking and destructive consequences of such development. 'Manscaper' (*New Writings* 7, Spring 1966) shows us a future where England is one vast city and artists find a necessity to break the monotony. The Manscaper itself is a vast mobile, constructed like a giant craw upon a cliff's edge on the coast. 'Therapy 2000' (*New Writings* 15, 1969) portrays a future of constant noise and men's search for silence. During 1965 *Science Fantasy* and *New Writings* neatly showed the two sides of Roberts. In *Science Fantasy*, besides the Anita series, a batch of Alistair Bevan stories demonstrated his imaginative powers: from 'The Typewriter' (January 1965), wherein an author's typewriter takes over and proceeds to plot a novel its own

THE PATIENT CRAFTSMAN

BY MIKE ASHLEY



to 'Detener' (June 1965), which depicted the life of a primitive tribe on an after-the-bomb Earth. His most striking contribution was 'Susan' (April 1968), a brilliant portrayal of a schoolgirl with latent powers of which no one is fully aware. Always the question is raised, 'Susan, who are you?'.

Meanwhile *New Writings* was presenting Keith Roberts' more technical side. 'Sub-Lim' drew upon his experience in the advertising world and dwelt on the consequences of using subliminal techniques. Another contribution was 'High Eight', published under the alias of David Stringer. Nearly 13,000 words, it was Roberts' longest story to date and also one of his earliest. It is set in North America, in a remote community created for the engineering and service a generating station and its line of high power pylons that stretch up into the mountains. A series of inexplicable events begin, centred around 'High Eight', the name given to the most remote sub-station. Despite their logical minds, the men are forced to the conclusion that something alien has taken over the station and is feeding upon the electricity. A very powerful story, it demonstrated Roberts' predilection for the power of machines.

A second David Stringer story appeared in *New Writings 5* (Autumn 1966), 'Acclimatisation', dealing with the effects of space travel on the personal lives of the spacemen. This was followed in the next issue by 'The Inner Wheel' and Roberts pulled out all the stops for the ultimate psi story. The narrator, after receiving a substantial inheritance, finds himself in the small village of Warwell where everything appears to be running perfectly. However, he finally realises that the entire town is controlled by a *gestalt* brain, the combined psychic powers of a group of espers. Later Roberts would rework the story into a full length novel.

His first novel, however, was at that time just being serialised in *Science Fantasy*. *The Furies* began in the July 1965 issue, and immediately put Roberts into the English 'disaster' school. In emulation, not imitation, of Wells and Wyndham, Roberts' novel told of an England ravaged by the Furies. They are four-foot-long, armoured wasp-like beings that devastate the country in the confusion that follows the Neptune Project, when the detonation of a 500-megaton bomb on the Atlantic seabed causes the Earth and the world-wide earthquakes. Before long the Furies take full control, and Britain is split into two factions: those opposing the Furies and those accepting them.

The story rolls along at a cracking, almost breathtaking pace, but Roberts at no time sacrifices action for characterisation. The relationship between the narrator Bill Sampson, his girlfriend Jane and a cockney girl called Pete forms a key part of the novel.

With the appearance of *The Furies*, Bonfiglioli met Roberts, and as a result Roberts was employed to do artwork for *Science Fantasy*, and this later spread to the rest of the Roberts, and Vinter publications. His art had first appeared in the January 1965 issue illustrating 'The Jennifer' (which actually appeared in the next issue) and then again in the May 1965 issue depicting Anita. The June 1965 cover was particularly effective, and thereafter he was more or less a mainstay. Soon his covers would also be found on *New Worlds*, and whilst they were not exceptionally brilliant in execution, they nevertheless had an atmosphere about them that was just right for the magazine.

A deluge of fiction was still appearing, and Carnell, as his agent, had also succeeded in selling some to the United States. His first appearance outside Britain was however with a rather mediocre story 'Survivor of the Third Planet' in the January 1966 *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. Dealing with an alien landing in Roman Britain, it contained little of his usual sparkle. More to the mark was 'The Worlds that Were' which appeared in the May 1966 issue of that much maligned magazine, *Worlds of Tomorrow*, Frederik Pohl's companion title to *If* and *Galaxy*. Another psi story, it tells of two brothers capable of creating tangible dream worlds, each trying to catch and overwhelm the other. A fascinating short, it has been completely overlooked by editors and psychologists alike, a sad remission. Happily you will find a revised version of the story following this article.

Damon Knight was at this time preparing to launch his own original anthology series, *Orbit*, and Keith Roberts was honoured with appearing in its initial volume with a brilliant story, 'The Deep's'. It tells of a future where the population explosion has forced people to live undersea. The hypnotism of the sea, however, breeds its own strange generation of humans.



2/6

Science Fantasy

A great new novel by
KEITH ROBERTS
commencing in this issue

THE FURIES



Introducing the story, Knight drew attention to Roberts' plausible handling of female characters, 'something rare in men's writing', and it was all too evident in his other stories, just how great a part women play. Anita aside, there was the strange schoolgirl in 'Susan', the cockney girl Pete in *The Furies*, Anne the controlled girl of 'The Inner Wheel' and Polly in 'Manscarver'. The girls live and become enmeshed within the action of the story; they are part of the framework, not just pretty ornaments. This ability of Roberts would be employed to exceptional use over the next year.

'Synth' was the lead story in *New Writings 8* (Summer 1968). As Carnell pointed out, Roberts was delving into controversial areas that a few years before were taboo in the sf world. A synth is a synthetically-produced human, far more than a robot. The story revolves around a divorce case wherein a synth is cited as co-respondent. With extreme insight and subtle



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Science Fantasy

A great new novel by
BRIAN W. ALDISS



humour Roberts unravels a fine case, both for and against.

Towards the end of 1968 Kyril Bonfiglioli set the cogs turning to alter *Science Fantasy*. It was to be reborn as *Impulse*. The last issue of the old title appeared in February 1966 with Keith Roberts' name on the masthead as associate editor. With the first issue of *Impulse*, devotees were presented with a superlative story by Roberts, the first of a series about alternative England, under the general title of *Pavane*.

The background stems from the assumption that Queen Elizabeth I was assassinated in 1588. Britain was immediately split by civil war which enabled Philip II of Spain to invade with his Armada, and Brian found itself under the mighty thumb of Rome and the Pope. Industrial and technical progress is decreed anathema, and comes only with painful slowness. Thus, the alternative twentieth century is a bizarre amalgam of anachronisms. Petrol engines are restricted, thereby making the steam traction engine supreme. No telephones, but instead a mighty series of semaphore stations manned by a closely guarded Guild of Signallers. Britain itself is a mixture of suppressed progress and Dark Age fantasy, where faires and large wildcats still abound.

The opening story, 'The Signaller', is poignant and memorable. It follows the life of a young boy, fascinated by the semaphore stations, who wants to be a signaller. Befriended by the sergeant of a nearby station his dreams are realised and eventually he sets up his first solo post in charge of a small station in the bleak hills of Dorset. Throughout the story Roberts shows meticulous attention to detail, both mechanical and human, and with his artist's eye traces vivid images of this alternative England.

The atmosphere continues in the second episode, 'The Lady Anne' (April 1968), which was retitled 'The Lady Margaret' for book publication. This time Roberts traces an incident in the life of Jesse Strange who, following his father's death, is left in charge of a road haulage company. 'The Lady Margaret' is the title of a particularly favourite road engine of the company, named by Jesse, we learn, after a girl with whom he was enamoured. The cunningly contrived plot and ending prove how good a storyteller Roberts is.

Strange and another 'Margaret', daughter of the first, reappear in the fourth episode, 'Lords and Ladies'. Strange has, by this time, built his company to great heights and virtually has a monopoly of the business. However, the story intrinsically revolves around the fact that now she becomes involved with the local nobility.

The intervening story, 'Brother John', is a brilliant example of characters and action merging into one. John, a simple monk, is a talented artist and is requested to depict scenes in the Inquisition torture chambers at Dubrovnik. Disgusted by what he sees he rebels and soon has a major following, many looking upon him as a new Messiah. The ending is both poignant and devastating.

All these episodes point to a final cataclysmic event; total revolution. 'Cor' Gate' supplied the answer in the July 1966 *Impulse*. A later episode, 'The White Boat', would turn up in the December 1966 *New Worlds*.

Slightly reworked, the *Pavane* stories were collected as a linked novel in bookform later the following year and received editorial treatment both in Britain and later in the United States where it appeared in 1969. It still stands as the single most brilliant piece of fantasy work Roberts has achieved, equal in standing to any of the great names in the field. And it was achieved by a writer of less than 20 years experience!

In the summer of 1966 Kyril Bonfiglioli, satisfied with what he had achieved with *Impulse* (and rightly so) and also having come into possession of a fair amount of money, left the magazine to Harry Harrison, himself an editor-in-chief, but he spent most of his time in Italy and his only real involvement was in capturing the big names for the publication. The donkey-work fell on the shoulders of Keith Roberts, now elevated to managing editor. His tasks were legion. He had to collect 80,000 words a month; pay the authors; placate others whose stories had been lost in the gigantic backlog; read the proofs; see to the advertising; write the blurbs; double on the editorials and do all the artwork. All this little time for writing and the only stories that appeared were ones written before this period. Nevertheless they were good stories. Anita reappeared in three more adventures, of which 'Timothy' (September 1966)—wherein she brings a scarecrow to life only to find he falls in love with her—was perhaps the best.

Alistair Bevan also returned, initially with a somewhat unconvincing story 'The Pace that Kills', set in a future where the power of traffic wardens has grown out of all proportion. Rigid Traffic Acts have made motoring a near impossibility and inevitably revolt breaks out against the wardens.

Roberts, writing as Bevan, then produced a real gem, a near perfect horror story, 'The Scarlet Lady'. Keith Roberts reveals in many stories his great love for the mechanics of motoring. 'Manipulation' had involved a telekinetic attempting to cause an accident in a sports car. Much of the action in 'The Inner Wheel' had involved a car. Then there was the traction engine in 'The Lady Margaret'. 'The Scarlet Lady' fitted neatly into this trend. The car of the title was a 1936 saloon, purchased by Jackie, the brother of the narrator Bill Fredericks who owned a garage. After a nasty accident involving a cow, it is discovered that the Scarlet Lady has had a history of killings: cows, dogs, cats—and humans. Moreover, the car has a fatal attraction making it impossible for its owner to part with it. The power of the car increases, until Jackie's sanity is threatened, as well as the lives of all others concerned.

'FOLLOWERS OF "IMPULSE", LOOKING BACK NOSTALGICALLY OVER THE ISSUES SINCE 1964 FOUND THAT KEITH ROBERTS' NAME WAS INTRINSICALLY ENTWINED WITH THE MAGAZINE'

Two issues later in the October 1966 *Impulse*, Roberts followed it up with another story about Bill Fredericks, 'Breakdown'. A lesser story, it concerns a clapped-out old banger that suddenly zooms around at a hundred miles an hour, and a small man who visits the garage seeking assistance to repair his flying saucer.

At this time *Impulse* was serialising Michael Moorcock's fine novel of a future ice-bound Earth, *The Ice Schooner*, set in the region of the Mato Grosso. Fascinated by this background—and with Moorcock's permission—Roberts set out to write 'Coranda', his own story about the world. Moorcock reciprocated the favour by publishing it in the January 1967 *New Worlds*. With an atmosphere of haunting poignancy, Roberts tells of ships which set out on the ice-bound seas to catch the fish which make them worthy of Coranda. Several years later Roberts would write another story, 'The Wreck of the Kissing Bitch', especially for Douglas Hill's heroic fantasy anthology *Warlocks and Warriors* (Mayflower, 1971). It would also appear in the December 1970 *F & SF*. Dealing centrally with the hunt for an ice-whale, it carried all the effect and aura of its predecessor.

At the end of 1968 the publishers Roberts and Vinter suffered a financial setback, and found it impossible to continue all the publications. After exactly a year *Impulse* died, and apparently with it went the brilliance of Keith Roberts. Followers of the magazine, looking back nostalgically over the issues since 1964, found that Keith Roberts' name was intrinsically entwined with the magazine as were the 'Anita' series with *Science Fantasy* and *Pavane* with *Impulse*. The Alistair Bevan stories were no less a highlight, particularly the motoring fantasies. Yet, from February 1967 Roberts suddenly disappeared from sight. Only the solitary appearance of 'Therapy 2000' in *New Writings* nearly two years later gave any substance to the belief that he was still around.

As a full-time freelance commercial artist Roberts was, of course, not compelled to write as a living. Nevertheless, his superior output of the previous three years was evidence enough that he delighted in writing. The newly transformed *New Worlds* was hardly the ideal outlet for his talents, but there was the American market. There was silence. Of all the names mourned for by devotees of the dead *Impulse*, the loss of Keith Roberts was the most regretted.

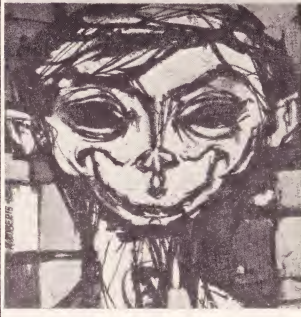
A slight clue as to his whereabouts however, could have been gleaned from the very last issue of *Impulse*, in which Roberts would be found presenting a lengthy summary of the early science fantasy of Lucius of Samosata. *True History*. What was Roberts doing with the writings of that questioning Syrian-Greek?

He was, in fact, deeply engrossed in research for an historical novel, set at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire. Two and a half years of meticulous research and preparation eventually produced *The Boat of Furies*, a massive work published by Hutchinson in 1971. It follows the life of one Sergius Paulus from his birth in AD 374 in Spain, through his adolescence in Rome to his destiny in Britain, trying to help the resistance against the invading barbarians. Written with the same poignant clarity

2/6

Science Fantasy

JAEI CRACKEN, KEITH ROBERTS
ALAN BURNS, PHILIP WORDLEY



as *Pavane*, Roberts showed clearly that he was as capable of tackling an historical theme as a science-fictional one. He has since expressed his desire to write a second historical novel, this time set in the Middle Ages. For one hope he finds the time to pursue this desire, since the outcome is bound to be nothing short of spectacular.

With that novel complete, fans discovered Roberts back in the fantasy field with the return of the lovable Anita, this time in *F & SF*. It was fascinating to discover that Edward Ferman, editor of that superlative publication, left the Anita stories complete, including Granny Thompson's ramblings and colloquialisms. Many Americans must have been puzzled. The November 1970 *F & SF* carried what I consider the best adventure of them all, 'The Mayday', wherein Anita sets out illegally to rescue a captured mermaid. All together twelve Anita adventures appeared in magazine format and another three were added to produce an Ace

2/6

Science Fantasy

JAEI CRACKEN, PHILIP WORDLEY
KEITH ROBERTS



Special collection for Terry Carr. Considering that the adventures are totally British in inspiration, it is criminal that the book has not seen a British edition.

During 1970 the circulation of *New Worlds* had continued to dwindle until the magazine finally collapsed. Negotiations however were underway with Berkeley Books of New York and England's Sphere Books to produce a paperback original—*New Worlds Quarterly*. The first volume appeared in June 1971 and with it the return of Keith Roberts to the British public. At the same time Hutchinson issued a long-overdue collection of his work, *Machines and Men*, including ten of his most brilliant sf pieces. Roberts was certainly out to prove he was not finished.

He was writing at his best, and compared with the fine quality of his earlier works that shows the measure of his achievement. 'The God House' in *New Worlds Quarterly* I, thrusts the reader into a post-nuclear world where humanity has returned to primitive tribal communities. Their religion centres around the Corn Lord, and every year a maiden is presented to the Lord in his God House. The heroine of the piece, Mata, discovers the truth behind the God House and ultimately leads her own rebellion. Unfortunately, it coincides with a barbarian invasion and leads to calamitous results.

Mata, like Anita, is a young girl suddenly made aware of the perils of the world. Like Kate in 'The Signaller', Roberts shows his concern with a young child's loss of innocence. This is particularly evident in the second story about this future world, 'The Beautiful One' (*New Worlds* 6, Autumn 1973). That tale also appeared in the January 1974 *F & SF*.

Taking advantage of *New Worlds'* taste for the bizarre, Roberts produced two most strange stories. 'Monkey and Pru and Sal' (*New Worlds Quarterly* 2, Autumn 1971) is a mysterious yet compelling piece set in a world where Monkey propels his truck around an island that was once not an island, with the aid of Pru and Sal. In the course of his journeyings he learns many things, but to no avail. 'I Lose Medea' (*New Worlds* 3, Spring 1972) appeared under his Bevan alias, and is a mysterious mixture of fantasy and reality. His major appearance, however, was in that same volume with 'The Grain Kings'.

Roberts' stories are full of vivid images: the semaphore stations in 'The Signaller', the giant crow mob of 'Manservant', the sentient car of 'The Scarlet Lady', the mighty machines of 'The Lady Margaret' and the ice-ships in 'Coranda'. Now he conjures up scenes of huge combine harvesters, necessary to reap the vast grain fields of the future, needed to feed the massive population. These machines trundle along at just over six miles an hour cutting a swath nearly three hundred yards wide. They are complete in themselves, with living quarters, restaurants, shops and cinemas—a community in miniature. Consequently combined with the tensions of any community. Several of these stories have been reworked by Roberts for his latest book, *The Chalk Giants* from Hutchinson.

His collection, *Machines and Men* was dedicated to John Carnell. Ironically, the last *New Writings* Carnell edited before his death included a new Roberts story, 'The Passing of the Dragon'. His first to be set on another planet, in this case Epsilon Cygnus VI. The dragons are a native fauna, once covering the planet, now following man's plundering of the planet's resources, nearly extinct. Two men, one a behaviourist, unsuccessfully try to learn why the animals are dying. The ending, whilst cruel is undeniably inevitable.

His most recent story in *New Worlds* 9 is 'The Ministry of Children' and is without doubt his most compelling to date. Angered and distressed by the case of the Southampton schoolgirl a couple of years ago who committed suicide rather than face continual bullying, Roberts set out to write a vivid account of a future where the senior children rule the schools, and both masters and children live in fear of their very lives. With this terrifying story Roberts has produced a minor masterpiece and proved once and for all that he is one of the major talents writing in British science fiction today.

With the heritage of *Science Fantasy* and *New Writings*, with *Pavane*, 'Anita' and *The Furies* firmly set in the literary world, Roberts has a grand future ahead of him. What a wonderful prospect there is for the sf readers of this country from an author who can produce masterpieces from a cold start. He is now 40, with a literary career just over ten years old. One can only gasp at the wonders the next ten should bring.







'The Worlds that Were' originally appeared in the May 1966 issue of the American magazine 'Worlds of Tomorrow'. The editor at that time, Frederik Pohl, commissioned Keith Roberts to write a story around an illustration which was to appear on the cover. As it happened, the artwork was extraordinarily bad and discouraged the author from accepting a similar commission a second time, nevertheless the story turned out to be surprisingly good. Since its first publication the story has eluded anthologists and editors alike but Keith Roberts has now prepared a revised and updated version especially for publication in 'SFM'



That was why I used to go out walking. Autumn was best, with the street lamps dingy and yellow and the puddles everywhere and the rain pouring down on our little Midland town, on the librarians and cattle markets and gardenfests and gasworks. Lovely. I'd stand outside fried fish shops and look in at the people crowded there coughing and rubbing their hands and waiting, and their fly-bronze walls and dirty electric fans and mirrors covered with greasy spots and the dirty clocks set in the yellow imitation-marble above the pans and the sizzling fat, the clocks that had always stopped twenty years ago and nobody had bothered to mend. I'd think about all the little people trapped in their iron cages of slums and I'd laugh to think I could get away and they

After that things started to alter pretty fast, mainly because Andy was always in the park at night.

10 SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

That Frozen Feeling

Ice and Iron by Wilson Tucker, Gollancz £2.50;
Winter's Children by Michael Conley, Gollancz £2.30
 Reviewed by Peter Weston

Of the many catastrophes which sf authors have visited upon our long-suffering planet, the prospect of another Ice Age is proving to be about the most popular.

There are any number of stories on this theme, spanning from Arthur C. Clarke's *The Forgotten Element*, through the semi-comedy of the same author's *History Lesson*, to *The Ice Schooner* by Michael Moorcock, probably the best modern rendering of the idea.

Now here are two more novels dealing with a new glaciation. That need not necessarily be two stories too many, but they'd better have something new to say!

Taking *Ice and Iron* first, we plunge straight into the world of around 2075 where, in North America at least, the glaciers are on the march once again. The hero is part of a team charged with patrolling the evacuated regions of Saskatchewan, as the advancing ice rolls remorselessly forward.

By an odd coincidence I received a fan-magazine from Susan Wood Glickson on the day I read *Ice and Iron* for the first time. Susan has recently moved to Regina, capital of Saskatchewan, and uncannily her magazine took up the description of the province where Tucker's book left off.

Ice is a decidedly cold part of the world from her account, and for me this added to the degree of realism in Tucker's description of the encroaching ice-sheet preparing to overwhelm the deserted city, one hundred years from now.

The comforting thought remained, however, that this is only, for everybody has always pointed out that ice is just water. It happens that quickly. Even Arthur C. Clarke apologised for 'taking liberties with geological time-scales' after all, what is a factor of 10³ among friends?

Not so any longer! For an article in *New Scientist* has been rather chilling words to say on the subject.

According to Reid Bryson, Director of the Institute for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin, there has already been a real and steady decline in global mean temperatures for the past twenty years. These are supposedly due to the activities of man, in putting vast quantities of dust into the atmosphere and so causing the sun's heat to be reflected back out into space.

We are at present living in what is known as an 'interglacial period', only 10-12,000 years after the end of the most recent of four successive Ice Ages. No one knows what caused them; or whether there will be another.

This is where the article is really frightening. It says that '... sharp changes can occur in only seventeen years or so, switching climate from interglacial to a full glacial period in only a little over 100 years'.

Whether or not Tucker had seen similar speculations about his novel I don't know, but he is clearly writing about something which might very well happen. And he brings a high degree of descriptive skill to his theme, at one point taking our hero to within feet of the green-grey wall of moving ice.

That's only one part of this carefully constructed, however mysterious, tale. There are a whole lot of strange things happening out there in the snow, fragments of mysterious origin being found, and eventually bodies... it is here that Tucker cleverly brings in a whole new world, a time before (or maybe after?) the ice began to advance.

Slowly and thoroughly, Tucker sets the stage for his solution to the mystery. There are pre-occupied followers of the late Charles Fort for a good many years now. How could there have been rains of water, frogs, bits of wood, blood, and all the other things which have supposedly fallen from the skies?

About this point I remembered that Tucker is a Fortean, as are so many other good authors like Eric Frank Russell and Damon Knight, and although I don't really believe his theory, I must admit it makes good, consistent sense.

To say very much more would risk spoiling the book for those of you who have not read it. But I must add that *Ice and Iron* belongs to what I call the 'Rama' type of sf novel; it contains much fascinating description and gradual revelation, but in the end the protagonist of the book can't do this much more than say 'I

He doesn't, for instance, discover that the new Ice Age has been caused by evil telepathic alien mutants from Atlantis, and doesn't Save the World. But perhaps we have had more than enough of such familiar clichés, and we can be content to follow Bob Tucker's intriguing speculation on ice.

Ice and Iron is certainly one of the better-written, more thoughtful books of the year. **



Winter's Children makes a striking contrast. Michael Conley is an enterprising newcomer to the sf scene and he has already turned out half-a-dozen novels on various themes. But I regard him, perhaps unfairly, as rather a kitchen sink writer, who takes a basic idea and then throws in anything and everything to keep the story moving for the required number of words.

His most devoted admirer could hardly claim *Winter's Children* is structured in a way. Rather, Conley begins with a group of people living in an old church tower in what is evidently a frozen-over world and takes it from there.

A new menace appears dutifully with each chapter; various members of the cast have hysterics or do silly things (fall down holes, get drunk, or are chased by 'flesh-eaters'). We begin with a Strong Man, An Alcoholic, A Neurotic Woman, A Cowardly Youth, A Wife Old Man, and another, ill-described character who speedily gets herself killed. Note the capital letters: for these aren't people, despite the dust-jacket blurb that 'the individuals in the small group are brilliantly portrayed'. They are cardboard-cutouts, jumping vaguely through hoops held out by the author.

Then the permutations have been played out in the tower, additional items of interest are brought in. First a Beautiful Girl and a Dumb Companion-Prostitute. Then a tricky Newcomer. And then—yes, you guessed, telepathic ice-creatures controlled by an Evil Man who wishes to destroy them all! Right then there are some effective bits of writing, but never for more than a few moments can the book be taken seriously. It's such a jumble of well-worn out stock situations and no one in the book ever seems to arrive at a sensible, constructive thought to help them get out of their predicament.

If Michael Conley were a little more pre-occupied with some of the more precarious, well-balanced dishes. After all their trials and tribulations the cast finally decide to leave the snow behind and go somewhere else. And so, in a philosophical-metaphysical work of some intellectual content.

If this is kitchen-sink writing, then the ending consists of no more than a hurried straightening of some of the more precariously-balanced dishes. After all their trials and tribulations the cast finally decide to leave the snow behind and go somewhere else. And so, in a philosophical-metaphysical work of some intellectual content.

Winter's Children says nothing interesting about Ice Ages, nor even about mysterious New World—mole-men. This one pass unless you really are a completist.

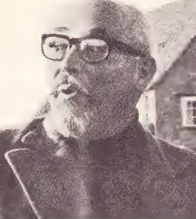
** In response to much criticism from the fans, Wilson Tucker has rewritten the ending of *Ice and Iron* for the paperback edition.

Hell's Cartographers

Edited by Brian Aldiss

and Harry Harrison

Waldenfeld & Nicolson, 246pp, £3.50
 Reviewed by Malcolm Edwards



I suppose we shall never know how Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison managed to persuade Waldenfeld & Nicolson that this book was a viable commercial proposition. As far as I know, they were the only ones who took it on—'which makes Waldenfeld's courage all the more praiseworthy. Who, after all, is going to provide an audience for the potted autobiographies of half-a-dozen sf writers, all of them well known, but none of them in the Asimov-Clarke-Heinlein-Vonnegut superstar class? Well, most of the readership of *SFm*, the would have hoped. Make sure your local library has a copy, and read it and enjoy it.

Enjoy it! You surely will: not all the writers provided the essay one might have hoped they would write, but the field is so drummed-up and intricately inbred that between them the six contributors to this book provide a good overall picture of its development in the last thirty-five years or so.

The first piece is perhaps also the best. Brian Aldiss says that Robert Silverberg's writing has made him a millionaire. Silverberg explains, quite dispassionately, how he accomplished this, by turning himself, in his early twenties, into a fiction factory who can have had far more effect in the history of the world than I. 'I developed a deadly facility: if an editor needed a 7,500 word story of alien contact in three days to balance an issue about to go to press he need only phone me and I would produce it.' More remarkable than this, however, is his gradual rehabilitation as a writer: firstly with run-of-the-mill but respectable children's books, then with increasingly ambitious adult non-fiction books (with sadly little commercial success), and at last with his triumphal return to science fiction. Silverberg writes about his younger self as though he were another man entirely; but he writes well, and honestly, about himself, and if he always maintains a certain reserve, one suspects that to be an honest reflection of a reserved character.

At the other extreme, Damon Knight is a man who would judge himself on his contribution. Damon Knight is a terrible gossip. I would not like him to know any of my secrets. Knight entered the sf world as a member of the Futurians, a New York fan club of the early 1940s, nearly all of whose members went on to make careers in science fiction. Knight rattles on entertainingly about (including a few of those who were plenty), taking an unkind delight in pointing out which of personalities have changed their names, and from what. He tells us whom he admires, and who he and who of writers' estranged wives have married which of writers (a species of inbreeding so complicated that it really requires charts).

Those are two very solidly enjoyed, most though in Knight's case it was a rather quilty Peeping-Tom enjoyment. Otherwise, Pohl and Aldiss are the most civilised reflections; Aldiss being particularly good on his memories of childhood. I would have wished for more from Pohl on his collaboration with Heinlein, and a little more on the sf piece Brian Aldiss had not started to describe the contemporary scene, trying to be nice to people, but had maintained more of the mood of his memories of Norfolk in the 1930s. Otherwise, Alfred Bester maintains an ambiguous attitude towards the field which he made him famous (as opposed to successful, since he has failed in other areas) and which he says he loves it, one can't avoid a sneaking suspicion that he slightly despises science fiction. Still, he relates some good anecdotes (including a marvellous tale of a meeting with a Dianetics-bested John W Campbell), and Harry Harrison, most briefly of all the contributors, provides a brisk account of his career.

These autobiographical accounts are not, it must be admitted much given to reflectiveness. Accounts to which they mostly are: no more,

no less. In a way, though, they are exemplary tales. There is no easily-achieved success here, only hard work and persistence. The five American contributors all served long, hard apprenticeships in pulp markets, learning how to write through having to write thousands upon thousands of words simply to earn a living at the paltry rates they were paid. Only Brian Aldiss followed a more literary route—but that, too, was a hard road with many pitfalls. Now, in varying stages of middle-age, they all appear comfortable and prosperous; but for the most part, they seem to have had fun while they struggled, and they avoid the temptation to moralise; and if complacency creeps in here and there—well, that's understandable.

* Harper and Row are to publish an American edition.

Nine Hundred Grandmothers by RA Lafferty

Dobson, 318pp, £3.50

Reviewed by Malcolm Edwards

It is difficult to be indifferent towards Lafferty's work: either you like it, or you can't finish it. I am not at all sure that most of his work can properly be labelled science fiction, although, at the same time, I cannot see how it could possibly be published as anything else. Pushed to definition, I might say that he is a modern purveyor of tall tales who, setting his stories in a present-day or future context, emerges with something that closely resembles sf. Arguments about what is sf and what isn't are tedious and futile, in my opinion, and I have no wish to get involved in one here: my point is that he has no obvious forerunners in the genre, but seems to follow a tradition which until now—until RA Lafferty—has not joined with it. I guess that makes him an original.

In his more recent work, Lafferty has moved towards a heavily symbolic approach which has tended to diminish his accessibility. In the twenty-odd stories contained in this substantial book (first published in the USA in 1970) the outlook is much more light-hearted (though in the last of them, 'Frog on the Mountain' you can see the direction he is beginning to take). Inevitable, implausible, always with a tongue stuck firmly somewhere in the author's cheek, I found this a constantly entertaining collection, it is virtually impossible to describe the stories without losing their unique flavour; but perhaps a snatch from one of them can do that, and sum up better than I can the Lafferty philosophy. 'One at a Time' is the tale of McKee, who appears for one day and proves himself to be a carouser of legend-making capacity. What is the secret behind his phenomenal appetite for eating, drinking, fighting, girls, and general roistering? The answer is that he lives his life on one day, and it needs reminding. How long have you lived anything? How old are you?' 'About forty years old by my count, John. Why?'

'I thought your stories were getting a little too tall, McKee. But if you're no more than forty years old, then your stories do not make sense.'

'Newspapers told me, John. You put unnatural conditions on day.'

Quite so.

THE QUER BOX

CONDUCTED BY THOMAS SHERIDAN

Readers' questions on any aspect of science fiction are dealt with in this regular feature by Thomas Sheridan, who is internationally known as one of the foremost experts on the medium. Address your questions to THE QUERY BOX, 'Science Fiction Monthly', New English Library Ltd, Barnard's Inn, Holborn, London EC1N 2JR. They will be answered as soon as possible.

BESTER'S BEST?

Do I have any chance of getting a copy of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*? I've also searched in vain for *Nightmares* and *Greenstacks* by Philip K. Dick.

Tony Roberts, Pontefract, Yorks.

Bester's novel was first published as a four-part serial in *Galaxy*, starting in the October 1956 issue. Before appearing in USA as a Signet paperback (1957), it was issued here by Sidgwick & Tiger (1957) (1956), and was later reprinted in the Science Fiction Book Club series (No. 31). It was also included in an *Alfred Bester Omnibus* (Sidgwick 1967), when it was first issued as a Penguin paperback. In a book entitled *The Best* (Garstone 1974), giving his views on various examples of modern excellence, two young Americans, Peter Passell and Leonard Ross, wrote *The Stars My Destination* their favourite of novel. They found it 'exciting nonsense' with 'an immensely compelling and very stirring plot' and 'a sense of several in fact—but nothing profound enough to mess up the story'. Analysing it in his *Search of Wonder* (Advent 1980), critic Damon Knight concluded 'Bester has made a work of art out of junk'.

In *Hell's Cartographers* (Weidenfeld 1975), Bester reveals that he got the idea for his story about a technician trapped in a disabled spaceship after reading an article about shipwrecked sailors in the *National Geographic*. He started to write it in a cottage in Surrey during a stay in England while on his way to Rome, where he finished it in three months after two false starts. Rocketry expert Billy Ley helped him with the science.

Nightmares and *Greenstacks* is a collection of forty-seven short stories, some no more than vignettes, but with clever humorist Poul Anderson. First published by Bantam, New York, in 1961, it appeared here as a Corbi paperback in 1966. A specialist dealer probably supply these books in one edition or another.

CONTRASTING CLASSICS

It was a blow to my ego to hear for the first time of *A Voyage to Arcturus* and *The Space Merchants*, which were both recommended as 'classics'. Can you tell me who wrote these books and whether you consider them classics?

Colin Hington, Bradford, Yorks

They are indeed classics, though very different in origin and essence. *A Voyage to Arcturus*, by David Lindsay, first published in 1920, is an allegorical fantasy which tells of a journey by spaceship to the planet Formance where many strange life-forms are encountered. But it's no adventure story; rather, one of the most remarkable, if puzzling, metaphysical explorations ever attempted in this form. Bester's inventive, highly influential, and later writers such as CS Lewis (*Out of the Silent Planet*), who said of it: 'Scientifically incoherence, the style is appalling, and yet this ghastly vision comes through'.

For years *Arcturus* was a rare collector's item, until it was revived by Gollancz in 1946 in their Connoisseurs' Library of Science Fiction, which included another Lindsay novel, *The Hammer Woman*. It reappeared in 1963 in their series of Rare Works of Imaginative Fiction, and was included more recently in the Adult Fantasy Series published by Bantam, New York. A radio version was broadcast by the BBC in 1950.

For full information on Lindsay—whose other works, *The Wind and Davy Jones*, have been forgotten—refer to *The Strange*

Genius of David Lindsay, by EH Visiak, Bk Brix and Colin Wilson (Baker 1959).

The Space Merchants, by Frederik Pohl and the late Cyril M Kornblith, is one of the most notable 'classics' to emerge from the American sci magazines; it has sold more than ten million copies in some forty languages since it was serialised as *Gravy Planet* in *Galaxy* in 1952. It has appeared here in several editions, of which I gave details in this column in SFM Vol 2, No 7. Read it, and your eye will quickly recover.

WORLD-SAVER

Could you list the Dr Palfrey stories of John Cresswell, at least some of which I surely rank as at—even if the science isn't always too accurate?

W Robert Gibson, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

I'm not familiar with all the world-saving exploits of Dr Stanislaus Alexander Palfrey in his 22 outfit, who are called to help the face of all kinds of menaces—such as interference with the world's birth-rate by the Master of the man-made planet *Nega* in *The Unbegotten* (Hodder 1971).

This is the thirtieth in the series of Palfrey tales, of which at least two have appeared since then—*The Insulators* and *The Voiceless Ones*. The full list of titles is too long to give here, but it appears opposite the title-page of recent additions to the series as published by Hodder.

WORLD'S END

I have just read *Earth Abides* by George R Stewart and would like to know more about this author and other books he has written.

Heather Childs, Gateshead

Earth Abides, recently reissued in paperback, was first published here by Gollancz in 1950 and highly praised by reviewers for its realistic picture of the breakdown of man's machine-world after he had been almost wiped out by a virus. American critics lauded it too, and I am so impressed that it was given the first International Fantasy Award when inaugurated in 1961, alas, soon abandoned.

Stewart was a professor of English at the University of California who wrote two other best-sellers, *Storm and Fire*, never published here as far as I can discover, nor does he seem to have written any more sf. Only *Earth Abides* . . .

MISSING PERSON

I am trying to find a short story about an admirer of Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan* who goes back in time to stop the 'visitor' from Portlock, only to become the visitor himself. Can you help?

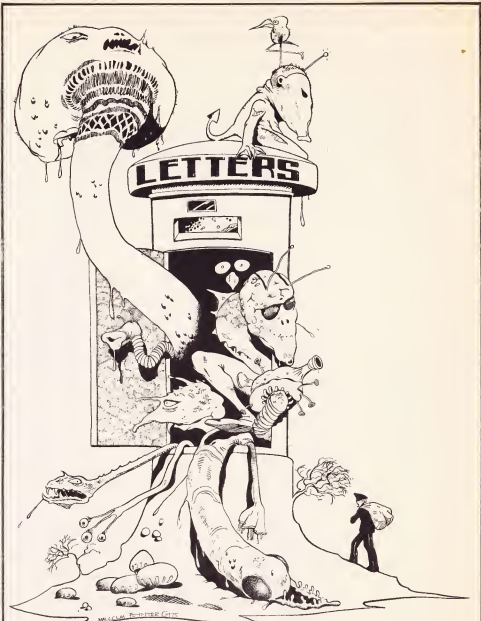
RG Magro, Herne Bay, Kent

The only story I recall which fits this description was, in fact, called *The Person* and appeared in *Portlock*. The author was Raymond F Jones and it appeared in *Astounding*, August 1947, before being included in *Treasury of Science Fiction*, edited by Prof Grafton (Crown, New York, 1948).

KIRK'S DUEL

What is the connection between the *Star Trek* episode *Arena*, by Gene L Coon, and the short story of the same title, by Frederic Brown? P Coultis, Sandown, Isle of Wight

There is. The episode, in which Captain Kirk engaged in a duel to the death with a reptilian creature, was based on the story first published in *Astounding* for June 1944 and reprinted in Brown's paperback *Treasury of Science Fiction* (Hodder 1958).



To Peter Weston:

Early in life I learned never to respond to negative reviews. This is a good rule for a writer to follow. However, I would like to talk a bit about your review of *The John W Campbell Memorial Anthology in SFM Vol 2 No 9*.

I want to respond mainly because I think you have your role a little wrong. I edited it, you responded to it. Now that you are an editor yourself I think you realise that the editor's job is not as clear-cut from the inside as it appears to be from outside. I agree completely that there were a number of authors who should have been in the book who were not represented. If the gaps were obvious to you — don't you think they were obvious to me as well?

Let me tell you about the ones we missed. Robert Heinlein was in the middle of a novel the entire time the anthology was being put together and could not do a short story. I was on the phone to AE van Vogt many times; the story he was doing just did not fit in time. L Ron Hubbard never responded to my letters. Unhappily, somewhere in his papers, there is a 10,000-word fragment of an unfinished sketch to *First Contact* by Murray Leinster. James Blish started a story that was never completed.

As for your evaluations of the stories themselves — I will not say a word. A critic's job is a subjective one. You responded as you saw fit. I worked hard with the authors to put together what might be called, roughly, a *hatschidit* edition of *Astounding*. We did our best. Please judge it on that basis, and the best of science, not on the abstract grounds of what you would have done if you were editing the volume.

For the record, the manuscript was submitted as consisting of original stories, and there was, of course, a contents page. The editor and I decided to join you in a shrill plea against the discovery that the publication appeared to be a reprint anthology — and the contents page was omitted.

Something no one appeared to have noticed during production: I was the person who discovered it when bound copies were delivered). A summation? Like them or hate them — but don't go to second-guess them. Anthologies like novels and short stories, do not just appear. All the best parts of their construction are unseen.

Harry Harrison (Dublin, Eire)

Why Weston replies:

Did I indulge in that little analysis? Because I wanted to understand my own disappointment at the contents of the memorial volume.

I grew up on *Astounding* and regarded

John Campbell as my god, and that's why I took the whole idea of a memorial so very, very earnestly. My real conclusion was not that the stories were less than good (though I stand by what I said) but that the whole idea of a memorial was suspect, something impossible to do properly almost by definition. *Astounding* was more than a magazine, it was an attitude of mind that, once gone, can never be recaptured. As I said, 'it's impossible to go back'.

That's not quite true. To *SFM* readers who are interested I'd like to recommend a book entitled *Requiem for Astounding*. Published in 1961, it recaptures better than anything else those exciting years when John Campbell was changing the world.

My review wasn't intended as a 'killer' and certainly since it was written (more than nine months ago) I've learned a lot more about editing. My apologies if it caused offence, anyway.

Peter Weston (Erdington, Birmingham)

To Peter Weston:

Just seen your article in *SFM Vol 2 No 9* whilst on my way through the UK to Colombo. Thanks for the nice remarks.

I'd like to point out, however, that Bob Heinlein wasn't the first to suggest the lunar launcher. I worked out its basic characteristics in a JBIS paper, *Electromagnetic Launching as a Major Contribution to Spaceflight* (1950 or '51) and used it in *Islands in the Sky* (1954).

And I don't claim to have invented the communications satellite. I merely coughed modestly and let the facts speak for themselves . . .

Arthur C Clarke (London N22)

Ed: Peter Weston prepared a footnote to this effect to accompany the article but unfortunately production difficulties necessitated its removal. Apologies to Mr Clarke and *SFM* readers for this occurrence.

I am a newcomer to the field of sf and I have only recently come across your magazine. I wondered if I could use your letters column to appeal for penfriends of about my own age (16), male or female. I enjoy reading sf and I am also interested in writing it, to date I have completed a short story and a novella and I'm into a third. My favourite authors include Harlan Ellison, JG Ballard, Bob Shekley and John Wyndham.

Tim Gillett (8 Harbord Road, Sheffield, S8 0BB)

Ed: Please write direct to Tim and not via the editorial office.

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DRAGON AND THE CROSS BY DAN MELLOR

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'They seized one of their own number out of the crowd, 'slung him over the cooking spit and wrapped him around it flexibly, binding his feet and head together. One Clayman stuck long, thin clay pipes into the victim's mouth, nostrils and rectum. Another kindled a fire beneath the spit. A third began cranking the handle to turn it. Others slapped wet clay onto the victim's body'



BY IAN WATSON

When we finally landed, through miles of hazy cloud, the Clayfolk (as we decided to call them) seemed oblivious of the silver ship settling in their midst and went about their business, plastering walls, moulding pots, and gathering food. They looked like upright, bifurcate slugs, with bodies that stretched and contracted as they walked, producing a curious undulating pogostick effect. They could pop out any number of pseudopod fingers at will from the ends of their arms, like clusters of snails' horns, then resorb them back into the wrist stumps. Proof of their culture lay all about us; the huts, the pottery, the cooking fires. Yet their blank indifference bothered us. Was this really intelligent behaviour?

As soon as we left the ship, however, the sight of three aliens in sealed suits galvanised them. They flowed about us, prodded us, patted us, and Rhoda was able to record her first samples of the Clayfolk speech as they made noises at us and about us.

Rhoda was a lithe young Negress, Lobsang a middle-aged Tibetan male, and I, as you can see, am a red-haired Celt, as speckled with freckles as any hen. Our features showed through our face plates, but the basic impression our suits gave was one of perfect triplet identity. It was this fact that disturbed the Clayfolk. But we only cottoned on to that later . . . (If indeed that was the truth.)

Now even I, a mere pilot, and no linguist or social scientist, very soon realised that if the noises they were making were speech, it was a very queer form of it. All the time, that same slobbery glutinous bark; it never varied! After five minutes of it Rhoda switched her squawk box off in disgust. A language composed of one single word? Preposterous.

Yet as we wandered round their village, it was impossible to avoid the impression of civilisation. Cone and cupola clay huts formed a perfect double circle around a central plaza dominated by a large hearth with a roasting spit. The one break in this circle led out along a straight avenue lined by rows of circular clay statues (seemingly of Clayfolk bending over to touch their toes) disappearing into the mists. And the cooking spit itself—made from stalactites bound together by strong fibres! I was amazed at how they'd managed to fashion such a piece of equipment on this soft, wet world, in the absence of metals or firm wood or even apparently of hard bones. No charred ribs or femurs lay near the hearth, and their own floppy, rubbery bodies seemed to have nothing stiffer than gristle in them. There

was, too, their miraculous mastery of fire, on a world visibly bereft of flints or striking stones, without two dry sticks to rub together!

'If I hear that word once more!' growled Rhoda, as the Clayfolk gestured at their spit, their pots, the roots and fungi and giant snails cooking in them, and named them all urgently for us, all with the same name . . .

'One word contains all words,' remarked Lobsang mystically. 'All words dissolve into one.'

Naturally he was happy that we were going to have to rely on his trance technique for a cultural pattern, rather than on Rhoda's squawk box; that is, her GCSU (General Culture Structures Unit)—which doesn't translate anything as such, but sets up algebraic maps based on whatever communication system inhabitants use, whether sounds, or light patterns as with the Giant Squids of the Sigma Draconis ocean-world, or gestures as with the Mutes of the thunderous Aldebaran planet.

'What's that mean?' she grumbled.

'Well, if you repeat the same word over and over enough times, you start hearing different words don't you? Maybe these folk actually hear a whole set of different words? But there's consensus on the meanings, because they're linked in some way, empathy, telepathy? It's an idea.'

'A very foggy one!'

"Foggy place," retorted Lob.
 "Their gestures," I suggested diplomatically. "Like Aldebaran, maybe? They're continually pointing and fingering." Rhoda shook her head dismissively.
 "They point at the same object with any number of fingers—or none at all. I've been watching, it's all random."
 "Then I shall prepare my mind for the trance," Lob concluded gleefully. "My privilege, when your methods fail. In my contract, no? We don't have long here. These beings shall become phantasms and projections of my own mind. I shall become mad and incorporate them."
 Rhoda had little time to feel chagrined, though, for it was just then that the landscape began to change around us...

Well, we weren't exactly taken by surprise! In orbit, we'd spent long enough surveying the respective motions of star, gas giant, and moon, to foresee some pretty weird days for the latter so far as 'daylight' went.

The gas giant itself, a dazzling blue, had only failed by a few per cent mass to become a second partner star to the bright orange primary. The giant moon was perched precariously just a few thousand miles beyond the Roche limit, that should have broken it into a billion pieces and spread it out like Saturn's rings had it been any closer. Yet it was unbraked by tidal forces. Every hundred years or so the furthest planet of this system rushed in on a cometary ellipse that took it inside the gas giant's orbit and out again—whipping the moon like a top, just enough to compensate for the braking effect.

Vegetation underwent a rapid change. Fungi wilted and dissolved. Ferns we hadn't seen before unfurled, fast as a time-lapse movie. Dragonflies hatched and took wing. Worms writhed out of the mud and leapt to catch them in tiny piranha mouths

We foresaw phases of orange sunlight, phases of blue planetlight, phases of bright purple combinedlight, and finally nights black as pitch whenever the moon faced neither luminary. Phases could be prolonged, annulled, repeated, however, in a quasi-random tic-tac-toe fashion, on account of the way the moon both spun, and tumbled, at once. An overall pattern only really emerged in terms of decades according to our computer's calculations. That life had arisen, and persisted, on such a world seemed fairly remarkable; that it was apparently intelligent frankly astonished us. Yet slave-drones had sent back tv footage of the Clayfolk village (easily spotable on infrared from the heat of the fires). We had to accept their existence, illogical as it was! Naturally, they couldn't have any real understanding of the true circumstances of their world, astronomically, buried away beneath that persistent cloud veil. Things must seem highly mutable to them. 'Seasons' and 'years' would be meaningless terms. Even 'days' must be highly flexible and unpredictable. Rhoda expected a novel and interesting language to emerge to cope with this confusion (but never, poor lady, a language of one word!).

So, as I say, the landscape shifted.
 From the blue planetlight phase, to the bright purple of sun and gas giant in the sky together; and if you think of purple as a dark colour, think again. It positively *ached* at us, till we had to lower the shades in our helmets.

This light change wrought new shapes and contours in the landscape, and erased the old. The blurred shadows we cast now were twin suns; yet each separate shadow seemed to project a cone of light instead of deleting light. Red and blue splotches accompanied us that seemed somehow more genuine than the prevalent violent purple.

Vegetation underwent a rapid change. Fungi wilted and dissolved. Ferns we hadn't seen before unfurled, fast as a time-lapse movie. Dragonflies hatched and took wing. Worms writhed out of the mud and leapt to catch them in tiny piranha mouths.

The Clayfolk speeded up too, to scoop these worms into pots, all the while chattering animatedly, our by now least favourite word.

"My God," groaned Rhoda, "it might as well be a different world now, just look at it! And still they go on saying, *"that's"*, *"that's"*, *"that's"* to it." She mimicked the Clayfolk "word" venomously, giving it an interpretation that it may (or may not) have had.

"In sameness, is difference," chuckled Lobsang.
 The Clayfolk took no more interest in us now. We might as well have been invisible; though none of them actually collided with us, I noticed.

"Enough for one day," Rhoda said decisively. "Let's look round the village separately, then get some sleep. Try your luck tomorrow, Loh."

"Day?" chuckled Lob later, as we made our way back to the ship together, through worms and ferns and dragonflies, accompanied by our brighter, more real double shadows, or "season"? Tomorrow, or next year?



To which, of course, Rhoda had no answer; since it was either, or neither, or both.

When we woke up eight hours later (by ship time) it was pitch-black night, and it stayed that way for two of our days. While we waited for a new dawn, we discussed that avenue of statues—and realised that none of us had actually stepped outside the village to take a closer look at any of them. It was as though the shape of the village was somehow self-sufficient, had penned us without our knowing it! We spoke of possible kinship patterns for the Clayfolk—another way of getting inside their minds—and discovered that none of us had unearthed the least evidence of who they bred even. Live births, layering of eggs, fission? Why hadn't we thought to ask where we had had 'til now? Maybe the constant undulations of their bodies had hopelessly blurred age and sex distinctions to such an extent that we actually found it difficult to think about them until we were back in our neat, functional, logical ship again, with our suits off and our own differences consequently obvious.

'Maybe they melt in the dark to reform next daylight,' offered Lob.

'Ah, the dark!' snapped Rhoda. 'Now, there's one thing they must have a name for, different from the light!'

'What point is there in naming the dark, when you can't see anything in it?'

'What I mean, you obtuse Sherpa, is there'll always be a special morning time that's quite distinct! I'm damned if I see how they ever civilised themselves, with all the other confusions. Yet how did they develop a concept of regularity—as witness that line of statues? The key must lie in the dawn!'

She was right. It did indeed. But hardly in the way she expected!

Shortly after we'd slept again and awoken to eat another breakfast in the dark, it dawned—a bright ruddy orange dawn, from the Sun-alone. We watched from the cabin window as the Clayfolk swarmed out of their huts towards the village, the huts and the village in horror, the way they actually put that piece of equipment to.

They seized one of their own number out of the crowd, slung him over the cooking spit and wrapped him round it flexibly, binding his feet and head together. One Clayman stuck long, thin clay pipes into the victim's mouth, nostrils and ears. Another knifed the fire beneath the spit. A third began cranking the handle to turn it. Others slapped wet clay onto the victim's body.

'Those figures outside the village, along the road! They're not statues at all,' cried Rhoda. 'They're them, themselves!'

'They must breed rather rapidly,' observed Lob with a shrug. 'He was a handsome fellow, wasn't he? The one all Clayfolk as equivalent to phantoms from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*—purely subjective demons of the mind, that couldn't ever trap the man who realised this. 'Quite an attrition rate for a little village to bear... if they sacrifice to the dawn every day like this!'

'So what? Oh, they are doing something, certainly, the demons. But who knows what?'

'What are those pipes for?' she whimpered. 'In his face and his behind.'

'Stop him exploding as they heat him up,' I said, ever the practical engineer. 'Seal the hot air out. Managing to sound tough, but actually apologetic, to tell the truth.'

The fire glowed, they turned the spit, slapping on fresh clay as the first coat hardened.

And we watched what had once been a living alien being transformed slowly and methodically into something far more alien and hideous. As the sun rose, in our rashness, had glibly classified among 'works of art' not so long ago. At what stage in the cooking process the poor tortured being inside that clay case ceased to be alive, I do not know. I only hoped it was soon, but I feared not, given the elaborate precautions to prevent early asphyxiation; as I saw those pipes were kept open to the air, and spread, by the ship's solid hull, from hearing the being's screams.

The cooking went on for half an hour, till the circular statue was completed to their satisfaction; then they doused the fire, and let the thing cool.

When it had cooled enough, a triumphal procession of the Clayfolk hauled it away on a stactalope pole, down along the Road of Statues.

'I suppose we have a history of human sacrifice ourselves,' muttered Rhoda. 'People being cooked in bronze bulls and burnt at stakes... I guess if dawn is the only fixed point in their world it's only because they'd worship it pretty fiercely.'

'Worship?' You do leap to conclusions, Rhoda. 'Do they have a better explanation? It certainly isn't a fertility rite!'

'I shall apply my fertile imagination to what it is. Lamas may slip in, where squawk boxes fear to tread, eh?'

Which was perfectly true. As the stars, rare rapidly found in its explorations among the stars, the alien wears many garbs—which socio-mathematical disciplines, the like of Rhoda's, couldn't necessarily always penetrate. Usually she did well enough—and Lob found his time taken up tidying phonemes and smoothing out kinks in her algebraic of alien world views (being a trained ethologist, as I said, Lob is a lamarologist). And he only occasionally asked Lob to help out with a trance insight when she ran up against some hopelessly alien cultural pattern. But this time she had run into a stone wall at the very start, with a vengeance: a stone wall with precisely one stone in it!

Lobsang was an adept in the Tibetan chöd ritual, where the celebrant offers himself up body and soul as a banquet for alien demons and imagines himself devoured by them, and proficient in the various maps of hell-worlds and paradise-places of the *Barro Thödol*, the *Book of the Dead*. So very remote from earthly reality, Lobsang could shut out his way, via such psychic netherlands, into alien mindscapes that resisted Rhoda's science; seeing all forms of being, from the Tibetan heights, as new houses by demons. To experience all this—and believe it to be literally happening—yet observe it all with perfect composure... Lob was well prepared psychologically.

So, when the Clayfolk flocked back to the village to resume their peaceful, soft-slowing tasks, Lob went out there, on his right to the patch of ground before the hearth, and drew a white mandala outline on the mud with an aerosol spraycan—he called the shape a *kyilkhör* in his native Tibetan. Entering this magic diagram, he squatted down cross-legged.

The Clayfolk flowed around the outline of the *kyilkhör*, touching gently, murmuring that word of theirs. Lob began chanting the Tibetan, the monotonous sing-song refrain to tell himself into trance:

'Zab-chö shi-höi gong-pa rang-döl lay bar-döl thö-döl chen-mo chö-nyid bar-döl ngo-iü zhu-so...' he sang, with superb breath control, his eyes staring wide behind his forehead, not seeing as all throughout we knew he would return briefly, but have peaks of the trance, to report the situation as he saw it...

'The shapes flow, the colours change, the world walks backwards,' sang Lob after a while in English, starting at us slightly.

'Yet we are thinking beings. We make, we build, we use. This world flows to and fro in madness. All we can say is that a thing is, for the time that it is. Not what it is, since it may not be again. A hand, a shadow, a colour. We must put a thing into itself and see how it fits. Then it is, and other things are. The fitting of a thing into its own shape is the shape of our agreement. The putting of oneself into oneself is the Making of the dawn.'

'That's why the Clayman is tortured?'

'We feel astonished by our agreement,' Lob chanted on. 'The sheer possibility of agreement on anything. But should we give thanks to the lights in the sky that we are in agreement? Shall we make gods of it that what is this putting of oneself into oneself? No, it is the prevention of a god! One is a hero, who fits into oneself. If one did not fit into oneself, every dawn, there would be no sun. If one says something different every day, is that a rule? Pain stops the world, in a cry. The fire is the picture of pain. Thus the pain pictures the world.'

Then Lob was swimming through alien waves again, seeing us, he later told us, from their viewpoint. What delighted them most was our inflexible similarity. We were three heroes, baked into our suits. Our ship, a single random object, meant nothing compared to our three suited selves.

Yet as soon as uttered noises, we outraged them. However fervently they corrected us, we failed to make the same sounds twice running. As heroes, we affirmed the being of the world; yet denied it by our every word, so that, in effect, we cancelled ourselves right out for them. We no longer had existence, in their eyes. So they ignored us.

Of course, this was Lob's *Barro-vision* version—his own effort to fit things into themselves, so that they made sense! We could feel free to take it with a pinch of salt.

'Chen-mo chö-nyid bar-döl ngo-iü zhu-so,' chanted Lob; then with a great bound he skipped out of the magic circle and hustled us back to the ship urgently, to tell us more of the way he saw the Clayfolk seeing things, before the intuitions slipped from his grasp.

‘An intelligent species must use language of some sort to be classified intelligent! What are these, then? Automata? Is this just an illusion of culture out there? The pots. The huts. You say they're logical beings!’

We stood by the window, watching Clayfolk moulding clay with variable numbers of extruded fingers, their bodies bobbing and undulating in the orange mists. While we watched, the gaseous planet rose to join the sun in the sky, and there were double shadows in the village again that appeared to cast light, not mask it; then not long afterwards the gaseous set again below the same westward horizon, casting the day backwards towards morning.

'Don't we torture the world into categories, in our own

way?' grinned Lob, lipsidely. 'With words and symbols—English, Tibetan, Syrian... With must be the noblest linguistic tool, the universal Number can hardly exist for them, yet they affirm series. Cause constantly causes logic out because they can't see into outer space to know the true causes of these strange effects. Yet they affirm logic. They deny the very evidence of their senses for the sake of it. Only this is culture possible for them. Only thus can they be ruled from day to day, and form of time-binding. Yet they can't speak about their world, because to do so destroys logic.'

'An intelligent species must use language of some sort to be classified intelligent! What are these, then? Automata? Is this just an illusion of culture out there? The pots. The huts. You say they're logical beings.'

'Ah but strictly they aren't so much logical beings, as logical personified, Rhoda. They're propositions, essences. They can't afford language here, it's too destructive.'

'Then they're not intelligent compared with us?'

'We see seem like nothing to them, Rhoda. They are really perpetually reasserting itself in the midst of the ocean of becoming.'

'They're zombies. And ghosts. You've let your imagination run riot this time, Lob.'

'Certainly it's in my imagination. It's because I have interrupted myself, I think, in my trance, that that's why it's true. They have group sensitivity, you see. Empathy. They share their hero's pain. Pain's the only concept we really have to communicate urgently, to stop it, don't you see? Only in this way can a name arise, of necessity, with its own internal truth. Then they can safely apply its truth to everything in the north-west, they can't see the south-east, they except by fitting themselves into their own shape; the world into its own shape, by extension. Really, it's the same with the universe at large. Only we never dare acknowledge it. What is a universe? I ask myself. One thing, by definition. The totality of all there is. There's nothing to compare it with. All you can do is put the thing into itself and see that it fits. They've got the right idea. We must attend the next dawn cooking, to hear it for ourselves.'

'Too tricky,' warned Rhoda. 'They may want to bake us this time.'

Lob shook his head.

'We mustn't say we're invincible now. Only Clayfolk make heroes. Only they can fit into themselves. We failed.'

So, despite Rhoda's qualms, we were present at the village hearing during the next dawn when the Clayfolk swarmed to greet the light: in this instance, light from a simultaneous rising of the sun in the north-west and the setting in the south-east. Amid purple mists and binary shadows we invisibles watched the spit put to use again; a Clayman folded over it, the fire kindled, the clay slapped on by many fingers, the pipes stuck in his mouth and nostrils and his rectum. I held Rhoda's hand, to comfort her.

'That cry of pain came again and again through the clay pipes stuck in their mouths, as he turned and baked inside the clay suit; and we heard that selfsame glib slobber bark as had assaulted our ears since we first set foot on the Clayworld.'

'I name this reality, Pain,' sang Lob. 'We stand at the place where the only real word is given utterance. It is the compact of agreement. It affirms What-is.'

Then, in a more conversational tone, jerking his thumb at the clay statue of the beaver statues, he added: 'That isn't really a road at all. Essentially it doesn't lead anywhere; it just leads.'

'A road must go some place!'

'Why, Rhoda? That isn't a highway, it's a rule, a series. An arbitrary series of steps, or a redefined path, or a fitting-in-itself. But I don't advise we pursue the Clayfolk out along it, we mightn't find our way back so easily...'

After a time the cry died away into a sigh that might have been simply the natural passage of air through that thing on the spit. However the Clayfolk had already taken the word up, and were repeating it over and over, gesturing at everything in their world.

'Admit it Lob, it's a nonsense interpretation,' insisted Rhoda while I piloted us up through the clouds towards the clarity of space. She addressed Lob harshly and petulantly, as though he was guilty of a crime. He only bowed his head and meditated.

Then a solar system was around us once again, obeying sensible laws; and stars in their constellations and clusters; and the far smudges of galaxies. Ahead lay the mother ship; silver dragonfly with bulbous head where we had our living quarters, long slim tail terminating in the knob of the hydrogen thrusters and wings spread to harvest the interstellar hydrogen magnetically. We all sighed with relief, even Lob.

Later, we classified the aberrant moon as UIS—Uninhabited by an Intelligent Species; dominant native life-form a biped slug with a high degree of constructive activity, insidiously programmed. By general consent Lobsang's version was voted the best, even Lob was happy to overrule it. We sped away to more substantial worlds, where his insights served us well enough, subsequently.

I haven't time to tell about his breakthrough with the fire beings of Acheron IV or the slime moulds of Deneb VII. But it is time to tell you that even Lob, that time on the Clayworld. Yet he never quite admitted it. He had his pride—as Rhoda had hers. After all, a Sherpa had been first on the summit of Everest on Earth. And the universe was our Everest now—an Everest without apparent summit.

By Julie Davis

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Rising Prices

We regret to announce that, as from this issue, the price of *Science Fiction Monthly* has been increased to 40p. This is due to an unavoidable rise in paper and production costs, over which we have no control.

SF Master Series

Spring 1976 will see the launching of a new series of sf classics edited by Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss and published by New English Library. Of the first six books in the SF Master series three will appear in hardcover and three in paperback. The hardcover titles are *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* by Naomi Mitchison, with an introduction by Hilary Rubinstein; *Martian Time-Slip* by Philip K. Dick, with an introduction by Brian Aldiss; and *Bring the Jubilee* by Ward Moore, with an introduction by Kingsley Amis. The paperback titles are *Mission of Glory* by Hal Clement, with an introduction by Robert Conquest; *Other Worlds* by Cyrano de Bergerac, with an introduction by Charles Harness, with an introduction by Brian Aldiss.

An Evening for James Blish

James Blish, author of *A Case of Conscience*, *Black Earth* and the 'Cities in Flight' series, died on 30 July 1975. He was a distinguished contributor to the development of science fiction both in this country and abroad. His world included poetry, music, ironic fantasy, James Joyce and *Star Trek*.

A memorial evening has been arranged for him at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on 19 February 1976 at 8pm. Friends and colleagues will present their images and reflections of James Blish, the man and his work. The evening is open to the public at no

DEATH RACE 2000 (see review below)

charge; tickets may be booked from 2 January 1976 from the ICA Box Office, Nash House, 12 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH; tel: 01-930 6393.

Star Trek Paraphernalia

The American publishers, Ballantine Books, recently published a set of twelve *Star Trek* blueprints of the starship *Enterprise* neatly packaged in a simulated leather wallet. *Aficionados* may be interested to learn that the starship has its own five-lane bowling alley! The blueprints are available in America at a price of \$5 plus 50 cents handling charge, from Ballantine's Cash Sales, Box 505, Westminster MD 21257, USA. However, it is not yet known if this applies to anywhere outside the USA. Watch this page for further news of availability in England, or write to Ballantine and ask if they intend to publish over here.

The Roger Dean Book

As readers of *The Artist in Science Fiction* interview in *SFM* Vol 1 No 11 will know, Roger Dean is one of the most successful record-sleeve designers on the present music scene. He has produced over fifty album sleeves for various groups including Osibisa, Paladini, Greenslade, Wizard, and Yes. When he was interviewed for *SFM* he was full of the plans for a book of his artwork and architectural designs and now, a year later, the book has finally appeared. It's simply called *Views* and is published by Dragon's Dream Ltd at £3.95; an illustrated review of the book will appear in *SFM* Vol 3 No 3.

Yet Another SF Study Group

If you missed the sf study groups which began in September, you may be interested to know of a twelve-week course beginning on Tuesday, 6 January, 1976 at 7pm. It will be held at the main branch of the Addison Institute, in Addison Gardens, London, W12, and Mike Mitchell will be guiding the

discussion. He plans to talk about the following sf novels: *Childhood's End* by Arthur C. Clarke; *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin; *Tiger! Tiger!* by Alfred Bester; *Dangerous Visions* edited by Harlan Ellison; *The Time Machine* by HG Wells; and possibly *Dune* by Frank Herbert. Also included in the course will be some discussion of four sf themes: Space; Time; Aliens; and Robots.

Further information can be obtained from Mike Mitchell at his home; telephone 01-542 8003 after office hours.

Two New British SF Awards

Orbit Books, the science fiction side of Futura Publications, are introducing two annual sf awards. The *British Science Fiction Award* is open to all British publishers who are invited to submit their best sf novels published between 31 January 1975 and 31 January 1976. Books previously published are ineligible. The author of the best sf work of 1975 will be awarded £500.

The *Orbit Award* is open to all unpublished sf works of book length (50,000 words minimum). Submissions must reach the judges by 31 January 1976. All manuscripts must be available for publication. The author of the manuscript considered the best original work of 1975 will receive £500 and the manuscript will be published by Orbit.

The panel of judges consists of Martin Amis, author, sf reviewer and assistant literary editor of *The New Statesman*; Philip Strick, lecturer in sf at London University; and Peter Weston who, by now, must be very well-known to *SFM* readers. The Awards will be announced at the British sf convention at Easter.

Manuscripts for both these Awards should be sent to: Orbit/BSF Awards, Futura Publications, 110 Warner Road, Camberwell, London, SE5 7HQ. A stamped addressed envelope must be enclosed if the manuscript is to be returned.

FILM REVIEW

Death Race 2000 and The Parasite Murders

Reviewed by Robin McKie

Science fiction's steadily improving quality has rarely been reflected on the cinema screen where sf films are still synonymous with horror movies. In many ways the film trade has been responsible for much of a missed public's denigration of science fiction and only recently has there been a trend to produce films of quality. Examples include Kubrick's 2001, Tarkovsky's *Solaris* and John Carpenter's *Dark Star* which had its first British screening at the 1974 Edinburgh Film Festival.

This year's festival produced two premieres of new science fiction films, *Death Race 2000* from the US and *The Parasite Murders* from the UK. Both dwell on violence, though a world of difference lies between the respective approaches in direction.

The first of these, *Death Race 2000*, a tale of a post-apocalyptic sport in a future society, provides plenty of entertaining action and lightly satirises the growing ruthlessness of professional sports. The film was made as a quickie to exploit the market created by *Rollerball* but director Paul Bartel, with his tongue firmly in cheek, has injected it with wit and comedy to greatly diminish the film's initially limited scope. Oppressed by a totalitarian regime of the world, the people of the United Provinces of America have only one entertainment left to

them, the Annual Transcontinental Death Race. Five contestants set out in cars to cross the US from east to west. The winner is not the fastest but the driver who can kill most pedestrians! Any person on foot is an eligible target, with babies and geriatrics scoring most points.

David Carradine gives a delightfully cool performance as the black-clad Frankenstein, hero of the crowds and favourite of the President, as he battles with his arch-enemy, Machine Gun Joe Wirtado, played with as much uncouth nastiness and venom as actor Sylvester Stallone can muster. The other contestants have equally ridiculous titles: Calamity Jane Kelly in her *Star Bull car*; 'Matilda' the 'Nerd' Morris in her *Red Car*; The Buzz Bomb; and Nero 'the Hero' Longhorn in *The Lion*.

The issue is complicated by the activities of a group of American separatist rebels, led by the improbably-named Thomasina Plaine, who try to sabotage the race to highlight their struggle against Mr. President's world regime. Mr. President will have none of it, however, and each ambush is blamed, for some ludicrously amusing reason, on the 'degenerative French, who 'as everyone knows, have wrecked our world economy and damaged our telephones'.

As the film moves along merrily with each black joke quickly following the next, Calamity Jane kills Matilda's navigator as he attempts repairs; Machine Gun Joe backs into his own service crew for giving cheek; and Frankenstein runs over the organiser of the race. Two particularly revolting tv personalities comment

on the activities. A syrupy young DJ-type tips over himself in attempts to top his own ridiculous superlatives and a, blonde, boss sister interviews victims' relatives while claiming that each racer's a very dear friend of mine'.

Death Race 2000 succeeds because it does not take itself seriously. Its only aim is to entertain, leaving messages about sport's political influence on the masses to more self-conscious cinematic efforts. Critics may disdain the film's superficiality but its lack of pretention makes easy viewing. Although much of the humor is born out of violence, it is never brutal or unpleasant and the ketchup is kept to a minimum. The film may not be a science fiction classic but it is amusing entertainment and for that, one should be grateful.

Now for the bad news. *The Parasite Murders*, an all too successful attempt at shock and revulsion, must rank as one of the most pointless, gory films ever made. It is the epitome of off that is lurid and silt in badly-made horror movies. The insistence that it is science fiction will do nothing but harm to the genre.

The film opens as a deranged scientist strangles a young girl, cuts open her stomach and silts his own throat with a scalpel. A bad enough start but a lot worse follows. The scientists then start to infect the residents of an isolated apartment block and, once in their victims' bodies, reproduce and

prepare to infect further hosts. The whole business gets thoroughly squid as they burst through skin or out of people's mouths. Director David Cronenberg pulls no punches and closely details the nauseating proceedings as infected victims bleed bloody kidney-like parasites.

There is no escape for residents, or the audience, as the film graphically follows the organisms' relentless progress through the apartments, and as an added 'bonus' each infected victim becomes a raging nymphomaniac. This provides a much-needed excuse to introduce as much orgy, nudity and homosexuality as can be crammed into the film's almost endless eighty-eight minutes. The film ends as the people of the apartments, now all inhabited by the organism, pour out into the night in their cars, seeking new hosts to infect.

All this sex and violence probably make the film sound far more attractive than it really is. Sadly, it is too pointless and squid to be remotely enjoyable. Bad Cronenberg chosen to parody his own ridiculous intentions than something could have been salvaged from the proceedings. Unfortunately, *The Parasite Murders* is totally devoid of humour or wit, and leaves audiences the choice of staying to rifle or walking out.

It would appear from this pathetic little calculus offering that there are still plenty of producers who live in the days of 1950 grade-B horrors, and who are only too willing to make films which do harm to the reputation of science fiction.









SINCE 1963 THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN INVITING ARTISTS TO WITNESS AND RECORD EVERY ASPECT OF THE UNITED STATES' SPACE EFFORT. THE GOAL OF THIS PROGRAMME, ACCORDING TO FORMER ADMINISTRATOR THOMAS O PAINE, IS TO SUPPLEMENT THE OBJECTIVE CAMERA LENS WITH THE SUBJECTIVE ARTIST'S EYE IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE TOTAL DOCUMENTATION 'AT ALL LEVELS OF PERCEPTION'.

OVER THE YEARS SCORES OF ARTISTS HAVE RESPONDED, WORKING IN A PROFUSION OF STYLES AND DIVERSITY OF MEDIA.¹ THE GROUP COVERING LAST JULY'S APOLLO-SOYUZ TEST PROJECT WAS APPROPRIATELY HETEROGENEOUS. AMONG OUR FIFTEEN MEMBERS WERE REPRESENTATIONAL AND ABSTRACT PAINTERS; SPECIALISTS IN TECHNICAL, ASTRONOMICAL, REGIONAL AND NATURE SUBJECTS; AND ONE LONE NEEDLEWORKER—MYSELF. PARTICIPANTS WITH SF CONNECTIONS INCLUDED: FRANK KELLY FREAS, VINCENT DI FATE, RON MILLER, ROBERT McCALL, FREFF, JAMES CUNNINGHAM, AND YOUR REPORTER. JAMES DEAN OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION'S AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM AND SEVERAL NASA GUIDES LED US INTO AREAS SELDOM PENETRATED BY JOURNALISTS, MUCH LESS THE PUBLIC. THE SPECIAL ACCESS PRIVILEGES ACCORDED US WERE A MEASURE OF THE PROGRAMME'S IMPORTANCE.

When Commissions Imagined By Sandra Neel

Central Florida's skies are low and wide, its July weather distressingly steamy, its insects uncommonly voracious. We were grateful for the air-conditioning in NASA's vans as we were driven past miles of orange groves and palmetto thickets. Kennedy Space Centre manages to co-exist with alligators, armadillos, and hosts of wildfowl—experiences with the indigenous wild pigs were less happy and these have been removed. The landscape itself, where clades of advanced technology rise beside untouched scrub and shoreline, provided the initial aesthetic stimuli.

Our first stop was the white room where the Viking lander was being readied for Mars under the most rigorous conditions of cleanliness. We were, of course, immediately impressed by this facility's sheer, dazzling whiteness. But this sensation of uniformity faded as we became sensitised to the palette of subtle tones from mellow cream to wintry grey on the other side of the view-port.

Then we donned coifs and coveralls for an hour's stay inside. This ludicrous process inspired such self-descriptions as: 'a snowsueded chipmunk', 'a futuristic nun', 'a character from a Woody Allen film' but entering the white room banished all giggles.

It is an austere, almost monastic environment. (I wondered if the workers found it anaphrodisiac.) The very brightness and neutrality of the place flattens contours and distorts one's sense of perspective. What I took for graceful metal rods with square terminals were actually cables disappearing into square holes in the ceiling a hundred feet overhead. The few spots of colour appeared—yellow safety markings, red exit signs, the blue glow of an insect-killing lamp, exposed hands and faces—issued uncanny vividness. Departure was like awakening from a dream.

The tour proceeded to the Viking vehicle pad, a distinctly unmythical site dominated by the purely geometric charms of the service tower.

Afterwards we were glad to leave the shadeless launch area for the cool, dim Mission Simulator Room and the chance to inspect some now-outmoded astronaut training apparatus. These included mockups of the lunar module interior (which seemed scarcely larger than a public restroom stall) and exterior (whose ladder bore the warning sign: 'Not designed for use in Earth gravity'). However, the principal object of interest was the Lunar Module Mission Simulator, popularly known as the



GEMINI ASTRONAUT BORMAN RECOVERY by Paul Calle, from *Eyewitness to Space* by Hereward Lester Cooke and James Dean (New York: Abrams, 1971)

'Train Wreck'. This forty-foot-high conglomeration of boxes, cables, and struts looks as random as a junkheap but is just as much a product of conscious design as any gantry. This structure houses a working replica of the LEM cabin into which television cameras relay surprisingly realistic lunar views that are generated by a lens gliding beneath a plaster model outside. A few members of our group took turns at the controls practising moon landings.

If the fragile, compact LEM represents one extreme of the space programme, the Vehicle Assembly Building is the other. From outside, the VAB is merely large. Our minds recoil from comprehending its real size. Inside, reality engulfs us with majestic vistas, colossal piers, doors and windows scaled for Titans. Beams, scaffolds, rigging merge in a riot of perspective, an orgy of geometry engendering patterns everywhere. The obvious, indeed only, analogy is Piranesi's *Carceri*. But the awesomeness of the VAB is simply a casual by-product of its functionality.

We had little time to examine the magnificent interior on this visit. Our destination was the roof. A glass-sided elevator whisked us up past a blur of girders and opened on a scene of unexpected serenity. The roof edge was its own horizon. Hundreds of thousands of square feet of pearl grey surface, resilient underfoot and slick with rain puddles, stretched before us. We scattered across this expanse, climbed catwalks, peered over the railed edge. We could see for 25 miles in any direction across buildings and parking lots; rivers, lagoons, and thickets; roads and the space shuttle runway. Flocks of black vultures wheeled against pale lavender clouds and hovered almost motionless in thermal updrafts before landing on the roof. Lights on distant launch sights began to twinkle in the dusk. I felt as if I were 'high on top of a mountain, away from the sins of this world'.

Our guides summoned us away before full darkness fell. We were reluctant to descend but beauties even more sublime still lay before us. We were now allowed to contemplate the spacecraft for the next day's launch. We sat on the apron of an unused pad two miles away and shared our reactions in quiet conversation.

So much has been written about these night scenes—yes, even by me—that the porcellaneous sparkle of the white rocket and

the gem-studded lacework of the service tower have been reduced to clichés. But has moonlight really been spoiled by bad poetry? Neither have these marvels lost any of their power to move the imagination.

Powerful floodlights intersected on the pad, kindled the rocket dazzling white, and flamed out across the sky in tenuous streams of palest pastel green. Snugly bracketed by the light beams, the Big Dipper hung bowl down directly above the vehicle. Venus and a waxing crescent moon rode in the west. The lights of other space centre installations glittered around the entire horizon. Here were natural and man-made beauty complementing each other.

And so the day ended and with it the artists' special treatment. Next morning we travelled to the launch in regular press buses. The press site is a semicircle of grassy, sand-flea-infested beach about three miles from the launch complex. It provides little except broadcasting facilities and covered bleachers. We could have occupied a reserved section of the latter but most of us spurned the shade for the chance to be a few yards closer to lift-off.

Having witnessed the numinous spectacle of Apollo 17, I inclined to be a bit blasé about the Apollo-Soyuz mission. Saturn I-B is smaller than a Saturn V. A glaring summer after-noon has less dramatic potential than midnight. Others must have shared my attitude because this crowd was noticeably more relaxed than the one for the final moon shot. And yet when fire blossomed and thunder ripped the sky apart, there was something of the same desire to will the rocket heavenward and genuine exaltation as it rose from sight. Whereupon we scrambled for the buses back to sketchy Cocoa Beach.

The works conceived here must now be produced back home. There will be future artists' tours. Other eyes will see what we have seen and more. But no other hands can make what ours will make.

I mean to be back when the shuttle flies. ☐

¹For a sampling, see *Eyewitness to Space* by Hereward Lester Cooke and James Dean (New York: Abrams, 1971).



Trust the Germans. It was on the morning of the last day but one of the Festival during the showing of a German film called *Parapsycho-Spektrum Der Angst* (directed by Peter Patzak) when it happened. There on the screen, in beautiful colour, an autopsy was performed on the body of a girl. No detail was spared, from the first close-up of a scalpel slicing through the flesh to a shot of the whole body peeling open like a piece of fruit. This was no medical film either, but an ordinary feature that had apparently gone out on general release in Germany—which made the sequence totally unexpected. As I was feeling hung-over and slightly nauseous before the film had even begun, an autopsy was the last thing I wanted to see at that point, but I manfully remained in my seat, as did the other members of the press. The public, however, were spared the ordeal and only the first third of the film (it contained three separate stories) was shown that night at the San Giusto Castle, the traditional venue for the Festival.

One needed a great deal of stamina, one way or another, to sit through several of the entries at this year's Festival. If the Germans weren't filling the screen with real gore, film makers from other countries were trying their best to put everyone to sleep. The Spanish entry, for instance, was a cheap and amateurish production called *Refuge of Fear* about two 'typically middle-class American families' trapped in a bomb shelter after World War III. Boredom, of course, causes an eventual breakdown in their mini-society but not before it has caused a similar breakdown in the minds of the audience. The director, José Ulloa, apparently had a good reason why he set his film in America (or under America, to be precise) but it escaped me entirely: perhaps because the only references to America that I noticed were repeated requests for the ketchup during the dinner scenes and the occasional sight of a copy of *MAD* magazine. Señor Ulloa didn't improve his standing by saying, at his press conference, that he had hoped to make *Refuge of Fear* à la Bresson, but commercial pressures had forced him to make it along the lines of Hitchcock and Polanski. If only he had!

Also pretty tedious was the Italian entry *The City of the Last Fear*, directed by Carlo Ausino, which was another 'after-the-bomb' story. The first half of the film was involved with showing the moral decay of a group of trendy young people living in a large Italian town; the second half consisted of one of the characters, a man, walking around the deserted town looking for his friends (he had been down in a cave when the bomb had fallen). The film ends when he enters a church, is overcome with guilt, runs outside and drops dead. The moral of the film, presumably, is that people who have promiscuous sex lives, and spend a lot of time dancing in discos, are all going to die in World War III (along with everyone else). It's the sort of moral you can't really argue with.

The short films also included several duds, in particular one called *Paris, la Comparsa* (also Spanish, I'm afraid) which was made by two people called Mirdala and Benet. Apparently filmed with a camera full of murky blue water, it showed a young man carrying a life-size statue of a soldier past various Paris monuments. That was all, but it went on and on... Estimates of its exact running time varied—some people put it as high as two hours, but that's probably an exaggeration—but everyone agreed that it shouldn't have been shown at all. This sentiment was echoed that night by the public at the San Giusto Castle. Considering that the members of the public each paid 2,000 lira for the privilege of viewing the film, it's a wonder that there wasn't an outbreak of violence.

For a science fiction film festival there was actually very little *real sf* in evidence this year at Trieste (of course, it depends on your definition of *real sf*). This wasn't completely the fault

of the organisers as good *sf* films, as always, are thin on the ground. The organisers are also handicapped by the rule that only films that have never been shown before in Italy can be entered, which automatically excludes much first-rate material. Nor is the Festival prestigious enough to warrant the big-name producers using it as a premiere showcase for their films (though that has occasionally happened in the past). Two of the three American entries, for example, had already been seen in both America and England. They were *Chosen Survivors*, directed by Sutton Roley—a cheap, mediocre film about a group of people trapped in an atom bomb shelter (again!) and menaced by man-eating bats—and *Phase IV*, the Saul Bass film about intelligent ants which featured some brilliant insect photography by Ken Middleham but had holes in the plot that were so large one could have driven the giant ants from *Them!* through them. *Phase IV* did win the

Festival's Grand Prize, but mainly because the opposition was so weak.

The British entry was *The Land that Time Forgot* (directed by Kevin Connor) which I reviewed in *SFM* Vol 2 No 4. A second viewing doesn't improve it any but its colourful absurdities were appreciated by the crowd at the Castle. As that was the night they had been forced to sit through *Paris, la Comparsa*, anything would have been great entertainment by comparison. One of the producers of *Land...*, Milton Subotsky, said at his press conference that he will be leaving Amicus Films to start his own production company, though he will still be involved in the making of the next big Amicus film, *At the Earth's Core*. With his own company he intends to make a series of three films based on Lin Carter's 'Thongor' novels and after that he hopes to make a 'Conan' film. The Thongor films Subotsky hopes to make use of the skills of American special effects man Jim Danforth whose model animation rivals that of Ray Harryhausen (Danforth did the animation in *Flesh Gordon*).

Apart from *Phase IV* the nearest thing to science fiction in the Festival was a Russian children's film called *Cassiopea*, a fairly humorous story about a group of school children who take off in a huge spaceship for a long journey to the stars. As it was the start of a series the film came to a sudden end but it won, deservedly, a special prize as a good example of children's entertainment and also because of its impressive effects. Another Russian film, *The Computer and the Enigma Leonardo*, directed by Boris Zagarijski—a sickly-produced look at the development and uses of computers—won The Golden Seal of the City of Trieste as best short.

The prize for best actor (no prize was given for best actress that year) went to Hank van Ulsen who starred in the Belgian film *Golden Ophelia* (directed by Marcel Martin). Ulsen played a sensitive Polish florist living in Belgium who becomes depressed by life and decides to commit suicide, but his attempt fails. He then falls in love with a girl and changes his mind about killing himself, but the police insist that he is legally dead and should finish the job to put their records straight. A visit to the Polish Embassy sorts matters right (doesn't it always?) but the film ends on a downbeat note when his depression returns, despite his new-found love. Ulsen gave a good performance and it was all beautifully photographed but it didn't really seem to have much point—though I'm told it was a huge success in Belgium. It's a complete mystery why it was included in an *sf* film festival.

Germany had two rather interesting films in the competition, *Parapsycho-Spektrum Der Angst* (*Parapsychology Spectre of Anguish*) the one I mentioned earlier which, despite the autopsy, was an impressive film but



BEHIND MONTAG, BRICKS FOR THE CITY OF THE LAST FEAR



SCENE FROM ONE OF THE THREE AMERICAN ENTRANCES TO TRIESTE



THE ONLY ITALIAN ENTRY: THE CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD

belonged more to the horror genre than to science fiction—except for the third and final story which some kind of mutant). It's a very black little story and William Berger, who plays the young man, manages to convey a real sense of evil. This episode, incidentally, as well as the autopsy one, was also denied a public showing, apparently because of its sex scenes.

The other German film was *Das Genie* (*The Genius*), which was made for Bavarian television by Rainer Eiserich. Compared with *Parasycho* it was rather tame stuff, though it was well-directed and based on the intriguing concept of memory transfer. It concerned the activities of a rich man called van Reijn who goes about collecting the skills of various world-famous people—such as a chess champion, a concert pianist and a Japanese artist—by means of extracting a fluid from their brains and injecting it into himself. Unfortunately, the process results in the death of the unwilling 'donor' each time and eventually a group of scientists, involved themselves in similar research, realise what he is doing and apprehend him. Van Reijn attempts suicide by jumping off a building but the scientists manage to salvage his brain and the film ends with van Reijn's brain floating in a glass tank while he happily plays a piano via a computer link-up.

The third American entry was a strange film called *Lifespans* which was produced and directed by Alexander Whitelaw. I describe it as strange because it was so full of contradictions; it had a fascinating theme, that of death versus immortality, yet the script was so bad one couldn't decide whether the director and his co-writers were really taking themselves seriously or it was just a big put-on. The film was also damaged by having an American actor called Hiram Keller in the central role. He is handsome enough (he co-starred in *Fellini's Satyricon*) but his acting range isn't very wide, he completely lacks presence and his speaking voice is flat and monotonous. As he was on-screen for almost the

whole running time of *Lifespans*, as well as being the narrator, these by the absurdities of the script. Yet despite all its faults—it's shoddy direction, its weak script, etc—the film looked beautiful, the result of being photographed by Holland's leading cameraman, Eddy van der Enden.

The film begins when a young American scientist, Ben Land (Hiram Keller) arrives in Amsterdam to work with a Dutch scientist called Linden who is doing research into immortality. No sooner does Land arrive than Linden hangs himself, leaving the American to carry on his research and also to try and find out the reason for the suicide. Land becomes involved with Linden's

former girlfriend and through her discovers that Linden was working for a disreputable Swiss drug manufacturer, but the old man dies soon after the examination and Land is blamed. He is arrested, escapes from jail and makes his way to Switzerland where he agrees to go to work for the drug manufacturer. End of film.

One would think that a film based on the potent themes of old age, death and the possibility of immortality couldn't help but throw up some interesting ideas and situations, but no, *Lifespans* manages to avoid these dangers completely. All the important issues involved are neatly side-stepped and there isn't one original concept in

the whole film—the various theories on ageing were apparently collected from a children's encyclopedia and the Juan Bunuel, the son of the famous Spanish director Luis Bunuel, it was an unusual film about a young girl's obsession with an old house and the murderous poltergeist-like presence it creates. Not only was it rather frightening, it was also very funny with several examples of the unique kind of black humour that the younger Bunuel seems to have inherited from his father. It was very refreshing to see a haunted house film that didn't follow the age-old formula but instead kept changing direction, often with dizzying suddenness. Juan Bunuel has so far made only three films and *Rendezvous* was his first, made in France in 1972 on a very small budget. I haven't seen his other two but on the evidence of this one alone he has considerable talent as a film maker and a big future ahead of him. *Rendezvous* is being distributed, if that's the right word, by United Artists but it hasn't appeared in many places outside France. With luck, it might eventually surface in England.

The Trieste SF Film Festival has been running for thirteen years now and for all its faults one hopes it will continue. This year's programme, compared with previous years, left a lot to be desired but its shortcomings were compensated by a very good retrospective held at the San Giusto Castle during the week following the Festival. Organised by a group of Italian SF fans it featured the work of Jack Arnold—including such films as *It Came from Outer Space*, *Tarantula* and *The Incredible Shrinking Man*—as well as more recent films like *Duel* and *Westworld*. The retrospective is to become a regular feature at Trieste which means that from now on there will be the opportunity of seeing two weeks of SF films instead of only one. If you're planning a visit to the Continent next summer why not arrange to drop in at Trieste while the Festival is running? Anyway, Trieste is such a beautiful city it's worth a visit even when there's not an SF film festival in progress. ●

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